

From the standing committees of the benefice

The standing committees of St Andrew's, St Chad's and St Clement's met on Monday evening to discuss and to decide on a pattern of worship for the benefice from January onwards. We discussed a proposal, drawn together on the basis of what had been heard over the past months in the churches, in PCCs and through our consultation day. This proposal was to move to a weekly 10am service on a Sunday in each of our three church buildings, alternating between a Eucharist and a non-Eucharistic service in each place, with services all together several times a year on special occasions and an intention to focus on sharing in fellowship, discipleship and mission across the benefice during the week. Other possibilities were considered, including both returning to previous patterns and also more significantly changing our pattern of worship, but no other possibility seemed to us to provide a way forward at this time.

After much prayer and discussion, we were unable to come to agreement on this new pattern. The benefits of a regular service in each building and the realities of our capacity in terms of clergy availability were acknowledged, and the principle of joint services on occasion and of midweek collaboration and fellowship were welcomed. However, there was concern as to the viability of a weekly service at St Clement's without the support of those from St Chad's who have been involved - this would put great pressure on the relatively small number of people who do the vital tasks that contribute to worship at St Clement's. There was also a genuine sense of sadness amongst us at the prospect that this change would erode the sense of togetherness and the life that worshipping together has brought to the congregations at St Chad's and St Clement's, while acknowledging that there are a significant number of people who are only attending worship on the alternate weeks when it is held at their "home" church.

We did agree **to change the pattern of midweek Eucharists from January**, since it is clear that the current Thursday morning rotation is not working well. From January onwards we will hold a **monthly midweek Eucharist in each church, but in the time slot that each church used prior to the pandemic, i.e. 10.30am on a Tuesday at St Chad's, 9.30am on a Thursday at St Clement's and 10.15am on a Friday at St Andrew's. Online morning prayer would therefore move to a Monday and a Wednesday at 9.30am.** This will of course be kept under review.

However, by a narrow margin, the committees voted **to continue for now with our current pattern of Sunday worship**, acknowledging that this is not perfect, and that there will now need to be continued conversation about a sustainable pattern for the future, including at a joint PCCs and ministers Away Day on 5 February.

The uneven nature of the current arrangement whereby St Andrew's holds a Sunday morning service weekly and each of St Chad's and St Clement's fortnightly was acknowledged, but it was agreed that a three-way sharing of services was too complex to be practical, and since moving to alternate weeks at St Andrew's would not allow for weekly services in both other churches it would thus serve no clear purpose even if we were so minded.

In all of this there is an attempt to leave the appropriate amount of margin in terms of our capacity so that there is life and health in our worship but also space to prayerfully and actively start, restart or develop new activities in order to reach those we currently don't. Archbishop Stephen is encouraging the whole Church to be simpler, humbler and bolder -

please join us in praying that we would become those things by God's grace.

We will be speaking to everybody about this at church, of course, but please do also continue to speak to us as your PCCs, and pray for us.

The meeting began and ended with the words of a simple worship song from Africa - Know that God is good. In all of our wrestling and dissatisfaction and as we continue to deal with the loss that the pandemic has caused to our churches, and as we look "as through a glass darkly" to the future, may we know this in our hearts, encourage each other with it in our fellowship and proclaim it to our communities. Know that God is good!

25 November 2021